

SETTING THE STAGE: THEN AND NOW

◆ Robert W. Knecht^{*}, Biliana Cicin-Sain^{*} and Nancy Foster^{**} ◆

^{*}*Center for the Study of Marine Policy, University of Delaware*
^{**}*National Ocean Service, NOAA*

The United States has the largest and probably richest 200-mile ocean zone (formally the Exclusive Economic Zone) of any nation in the world. Great fisheries lie off New England, the Pacific Northwest and Alaska, and in the Gulf of Mexico; large offshore oil and gas deposits exist in the Gulf and off California and Alaska; stunningly beautiful beaches line virtually all of our shores. And, 95% of the trade that keeps our nation prosperous is carried on those oceans through great ports like New York-New Jersey, Los Angeles-Long Beach and Houston and New Orleans.

Yet, for the most part, we have not done well by our oceans. We have used them as sewers only stopping the practice when the consequences became intolerable. We have seen many of our fish stocks fall to disastrously low levels both because too many of us want to fish and because we carelessly destroy the coastal habitats upon which these valuable resources depend. And, we have seen the national program to explore and develop offshore hydrocarbon deposits reach virtual stalemate in many regions of the country due to intergovernmental conflicts over policy and practice.

But there are some bright spots. Thirty-two years ago, the Congress enacted legislation that focused unprecedented attention on our coasts and oceans and led to the establishment of both a vice president-led Marine Sciences Council and the blue ribbon Stratton Commission and led to the seminal report of that commission in 1969 - *Our Nation and the Sea*. This meeting was prompted by the fact that similar legislation is pending in Congress today and again it offers the prospect of focusing high level attention on the oceans and their value to the American people.

We have, of course, seen many changes since the mid-1960s. The Stratton Commission's good work led directly to the establishment of the nation's ocean agency - NOAA - and to the enactment of innovative

coastal zone management legislation. In addition, the decade following the Stratton Commission's report saw a great many new ocean and coastal programs enacted into law - programs dealing with marine mammals, ports and harbors, water quality, marine sanctuaries, ocean dumping, fisheries, offshore oil and gas, and on and on. And, a substantial increase in the interest and capacity of the coastal states and territories to deal with coastal and, increasingly, ocean issues was stimulated by this spate of ocean legislation.

The latter half of the 30-year period since Stratton has seen a corresponding burst of activity at the global level. Growing concern, especially in scientific circles, about two emerging problems - the prospect that mankind's activities were beginning to change the world's climate and, as well, dangerously accelerate the loss of species and biological diversity, coupled with the realization that many of our societies were living unsustainably, led to another seminal event - the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Like the decade of the 1970s domestically, the decade of the 1990s has seen international agreements on climate change and biodiversity, it has seen a comprehensive Law of the Sea Convention finally enter into force, and it has seen substantial international programs developed that deal with integrated coastal management, land-based sources of marine pollution, and with the protection and sustainable use of coral reefs.

1998 is a far different time than 1968. The issues of Sputnik and the science-math gap with the USSR which catalized the earlier inquiry have been replaced by issues of international competitiveness, globalization of world trade, north-south relations, climate change, and loss of biodiversity. But the oceans are related to these new issues as they were to the older ones. How we organize to deal with them

and the national goals and policies that we set remain of critical importance to the nation.

The “Year of the Ocean” offers a splendid platform for beginning the new review. The set of issue papers produced by federal agencies, the Heinz Center process, and the National Ocean Conference all help set the stage.

The present meeting - the Stratton Roundtable - and the follow-on dialogues that are planned for the fall and beyond, are the result of collaboration between a scholarly group concerned, since its establishment in 1991, with improved ocean governance - the Ocean Governance Study Group, an academic institution long involved with ocean policy in the United States and close enough to try to do something about it - the Center for the Study of Marine Policy, Graduate College of Marine Studies, University of Delaware, and a government agency interested in enhancing its effectiveness as a coastal and ocean steward - the National Ocean Service of NOAA. Of course, we hope that these activities will also contribute to the “Year of the Ocean” and to setting the stage.

What remains, of course, is for a good Oceans Act to be passed and a well-qualified, well-supported, and well-led ocean policy commission to be put in place. We look forward to that development.

Organization of this Volume

The Stratton Roundtable, convened on May 1, 1998, is the first of a series of Dialogues in National Ocean Policy to be held in 1998-1999 on important national ocean policy issues. The Roundtable brings together a number of former members of the Stratton Commission and its staff, as well as participants from the Congress, Administration, state governments, industry, environmental interests, and academia to discuss what lessons can be learned from the Stratton Commission which may be applicable to a future ocean policy commission.

In this volume may be found, first, a series of reflections on the work of the Stratton Commission and its significance, followed by a number of contributions which analyze current challenges in ocean policy, describe changes which have taken place since the 1960s, and highlight future trends which will affect ocean policy in the next century. Various appendices describe the current ocean policy bills, the process of conducting the Dialogues on National Ocean Policy, as well as future dialogues on ocean policy changes and future trends, and provide information on Roundtable participants and on the Ocean Governance Study Group.